

Back then, if she thought a particular bill needed to be killed, she waved a black flag adorned with a skull and crossbones, declaring the measure needed to be "black flag dead."

"It's now in the nomenclature of the Legislature. They wanted my son to use it," Meek says, referring to state Sen. Kendrick Meek, D-Miami.

Carrie Meek has established a fairly liberal voting record, generally following Democratic endorsements of affirmative action, abortion rights, gun control, and spending on housing and job creation. She has favored increasing the minimum wage, expanding the rights of immigrants, and giving tax credits to small businesses in her district.

Her current causes: Census 2000, which aims to count minorities fully in the upcoming census, and additional research on lupus, the autoimmune disease that claimed her sister.

Meek has sided with Republicans on some matters, such as opposing military defense cuts or foreign-policy adjustments to ease relations with Cuba.

On voting evaluations this year, Meek scored 95 or better with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the nation's largest public service employees union, and with Americans for Democratic Action, a group that promotes human rights.

She fared worse with business groups, scoring 28 with the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, and only four with the American Conservative Union, which focuses on foreign-policy, social and budget issues.

At a party Sept. 17, 300 supporters gathered on a Washington rooftop to celebrate Meek's 20-year tenure in politics. The guest list included Miami-Dade Commissioners Betty Ferguson and Dennis Moss, Opa-locka Mayor Alvin Miller and representatives of Washington's black elite.

The woman they toasted had graduated from neighborhood activist to power broker. She is one of 60 members of the House Appropriations Committee, where virtually every spending billion housing, transportation, taxes or juvenile crime—is scrutinized.

Remarkably, Meek won a spot on Appropriations during her freshman year. In that term, she sponsored, and won, a measure providing Social Security retirement for nannies and day laborers. After Hurricane Andrew, she helped to obtain more than \$100 million in federal aid for South Florida, and joined the fight to rebuild what had been Homestead Air Force Base.

The past 12 months have brought success and failure.

Meek pushed unsuccessfully for a bill that would employ welfare recipients as census takers. Also stalled is her attempt to increase funding for lupus research.

On the other hand, Meek helped to bring Miami-Dade about \$80 million in economic development money this year. And, with the aid of Florida Republican lawmakers such as Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Sen. Connie Mack, she helped to establish new protections for almost 50,000 Haitian immigrants.

Perhaps the biggest prize was the empowerment-zone designation, which will mean \$130 million in tax incentives over 10 years, and millions more in job grants.

Norman Ornstein, a policy analyst for the conservative American Enterprise Institute, says Meek has carved out a political niche.

"She's open, frank . . . a nice person who works hard," Ornstein says. "When people say nice things about her, it's not just blowing smoke. She ranges across a series of

areas: Cuba, Haitians, housing. What she does is outside the norm."

Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., says Meek has kept her eye on an important goal: looking out for the people in her district.

"We see showboats and we see tugboats," Lewis says. "She's a tugboat. I never want to be on the side of issues against her."

Carrie Pittman Davis Meek was born in Tallahassee. She is a granddaughter of slaves, the youngest of 12 children and a firsthand witness to the injustices of bigotry.

Though she grew up in the shadow of the Florida Capitol, segregation prevented her from setting foot in state offices. Her father, Willie, one of the great influences in her life, took her onto the Capitol grounds on the only day it was permitted—inauguration day.

"I grew up in a discriminatory society," she says. "I knew what it was like to be treated differently. I wanted to see things changed, and wanted to assist any movement to help with changing it."

Though she graduated with honors in biology and physical education from Florida A&M, her race kept her from medical training at state colleges. She enrolled at the University of Michigan and received a master's degree in public health.

After college, Meek returned to Florida and pursued a career in education, working for 30 years as an instructor at Florida A&M and Bethune-Cookman College, and as an administrator at Miami-Dade Community College.

Her interest in public service was kindled in the late 1960s, when she became the local director of the federally funded Model Cities program. She designed recreation programs for low-income public housing tenants.

"I learned people needed homes, schools, day-care centers," Meek says. "I learned of all these unmet needs in the community."

In 1979, some tenants in those same Miami neighborhoods urged Meek to run for a vacant seat in the Legislature. Meek initially ran into resistance from some of Miami's black political leaders, who favored James Burke, a Democrat who had name recognition because of a previous unsuccessful House race. Now, Burke is on trial in federal court, accused of bribery.

Meek defeated Burke in the primary, trounced Republican Roberto Casas in the general election, and assumed office with a central goal: to champion "little people" causes such as housing, education and equal access.

Over the past 20 years, Meek has achieved milestones: the first black female to serve in the state Senate, the first leader of the state's black caucus, and the first black from Florida in modern history elected to Congress.

Her District 17 stretches through the central part of Miami-Dade, from Carol City to Homestead.

When not in Washington, Meek returns to the house in Liberty City—a few blocks from the Martin Luther King Metrorail station—where she has lived for 35 years.

Divorced twice and living alone, she likes dancing, quiet evenings at home, reading books or playing with Duchess, a great Dane puppy.

HOPES IN LIBERTY CITY

Federal aid for housing shows "possibilities of what can happen." It is just after 10:30 a.m. on a recent weekday, and Carrie Meek is riding along Miami's Northwest 27th Avenue. Since a ceremony last month, the street carries her name: Carrie P. Meek Boulevard.

She is headed to the Miami-Dade Housing Agency to join U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Andrew Cuomo for an announcement: a \$35 million federal housing award for renovation of the Scott and Carver housing developments in Liberty City.

On three previous attempts, the county missed a shot at the funding. Last year, Meek's staff asked HUD to help the county craft a better application.

Problems are chronic at the housing developments. But with the new money, housing officials intend to start over. Demolition is set for 754 units at Scott Homes and 96 at Carver Homes. In their place, the county will build 382 single-family and townhome units, adding more grass and trees.

The housing agency has great hopes for the project—lower density, reduced poverty, less crime. Meek says the assistance is long overdue.

"It's about the possibilities of what can happen in Liberty City," she says.

COOPERATIVES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CLAYTON. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about cooperatives, but I cannot resist talking about my friend, the gentleman from Florida (Mrs. MEEK).

I did not know the gentlewoman before I came to Congress. I did not have that privilege. But we have become soul mates here, and I certainly want to express my admiration for her constituents, who understand her value and the true quality of the person representing them. I want to commend the newspaper, who also understands quality of service. So I just wanted to add those additional remarks.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk about cooperatives and to say this is National Cooperative Week, celebrating the founding of cooperatives and why they are special and why we make this recognition.

Cooperative businesses are special because they are owned by the consumers they serve and because they are guided by a set of principles that reflect the interests of those consumers. More than 100 million people are members of some 47,000 U.S. cooperatives, enabling consumers to secure a wide array of goods and services, such as health care, insurance, housing, food, heating, electricity, credit unions, child care, as well as farming.

Farming community cooperatives indeed have been very important. In the agricultural sector, USDA's Cooperative Services' survey of farmer cooperatives for the year 1995 reported that actually there were more than 4,006 cooperatives in operation. These associations provide a variety of services, from buying, as well as producing, as well as marketing. So they have made a difference.

Cooperatives structured properly can be of great benefit to farmers. They focus on their ability to collectively

buy at the most economic rates. They also allow them to sell and to be in an association to market their goods. So cooperatives in the farming community is very, very special, and we want to commend and strengthen their service in the rural community.

Cooperatives are also effective in electric. In my area, I come from rural America, and electric cooperatives have made the difference. They have been in eastern North Carolina from the very beginning. In fact, in the 1940s, it was not very profitable to have electricity in our areas, and they were established in eastern North Carolina, which is sparsely populated, and they have made the difference. They have grown in my district. In fact, I perhaps have more electric cooperatives than anyone else in my State, and they are of value.

In fact, in the recent Hurricane Floyd that we had, it was indeed the cooperatives not only in the State but those cooperatives from out of the State who came to the rescue of the cooperatives who were affected by Floyd. In fact, some 260 electric members were without electricity for a period of time, and there were 700 cooperative linemen of the entire State who engaged in securing the additional support for the rural utility service.

So I want to just commend cooperatives and to say how valuable they have been for the quality of life and the protection of consumers and the value they have meant both in the agricultural community and also in the electrical service area.

Cooperatives structured properly can be of great benefit to farmers. They help focus buying strength for quantity discounts on input and combine a larger volume to get a higher price on output.

From an economic standpoint cooperatives can improve the bottom line and cut out the middleman, they create efficiencies that allow cooperative members to be stock holders and receive rebates.

Cooperatives were born out of the low prices of the 1930's as the farmers' response to dealing with these low prices . . . now as we move towards consolidation and vertical integration farmers cooperatives in general will serve a more vital role than they have in the past.

Cooperatives will continue to hold down prices by creating diversity within the market place.

Electric cooperatives have been these since "the beginning" because they began electric power service in North Carolina. In the 1940s it simply wasn't profitable for established power companies to serve the sparsely-settled areas of eastern North Carolina.

The electric cooperatives have grown with my district. Without stable, reliable electric infrastructure, economic development could not have taken place.

Are they still needed today? Of course, they are. Cooperatives—owned by their customers—have been there when no one else wanted the outlying areas and they are still

there, standing shoulder to shoulder with today's businesses ensuring that customers—large and small—can benefit in an ever-changing market environment.

Electric cooperatives are not just cooperatives in name only, they truly stand for "co-operation".

Hurricane Floyd provides an all too timely and graphic example as to the value of electric cooperatives.

While more than 260,000 electric members were without power, the 700 cooperative linemen of the entire state came together to "turn on the lights" in eastern NC. Additionally, 600 electric co-op linemen from 10 states came in to assist. As the cooperatives borrow the Rural Utilities Service, standard engineering and construction facilitate out of state electric cooperative crews coming in to provide much needed hands-on assistance that is vital to restoring power.

Electric cooperatives continue to serve vital functions in the coming new millennium as they did when they were first formed. Rather than constructing and bringing power into kerosene-lit homes, they now will continue to assist consumers through an ever-changing landscape of a restructured electric industry. Through the use of the cooperative model and principles, consumers need to be able to pull together as a electric-buying cooperative in order to create buying leverage in an open marketplace. Consumers can make themselves a powerful force in the marketplace . . . just as cooperatives have been doing for years.

Electric cooperatives are working on models such as this in areas of the country that have begun to open their electric markets.

Cooperatives can also serve consumers by bundling packages of utility services—such as internet, other home heating sources, water and sewer—to provide "one stop" shopping convenience. This is especially true for rural areas that traditionally are left behind when it comes to competitive services.

CO-OPS IMPORTANT TO IOWA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. BOSWELL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BOSWELL. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here tonight along with the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) and the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY) to honor and appreciate cooperatives across America. It is important to honor and recognize these valuable institutions, America's co-ops, not only during national co-op month but every day because of the importance they play in every community's life.

Years ago, farmers across our State, many years ago, had no place to purchase their inputs or no place to store their grain or to market. They were really at the mercy of a handful of people, and sometimes they could not even get their grain anywhere. Well, co-ops came into existence. They were organized across our State and across the land, and they are very important to

our Nation and they are very important to our State of Iowa.

There are 47,000 cooperatives of all types in the U.S., and they serve 120 million in all 50 States. One of every four people in the United States is a member of a co-op. In Iowa, co-ops originate about 75 percent of the grain sold by Iowa farmers. Iowa's rural electric co-ops, which the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) mentioned how important they are, they certainly are to me, I have three meters on a co-op line at my farm, serve more than 176,000 farms, homes, and businesses in all of our 99 counties. There are over 220 credit unions in Iowa that have more than 740,000 members. Iowa has 124 cooperative farm organizations that total 322 sites throughout the State. The bottom line is nearly everyone's life in Iowa is touched by a co-op in one way or another.

Cooperative associations can take on different forms within the communities they serve. Certainly they serve as business organizations, but they can also be the lifeblood of the community, providing the backbone and the strength to the residents of the area. Local control and local ownership make co-ops a special kind of business because of the commitment not only to the people they serve but also to the communities in which they exist.

Co-ops can take on many different functions in a community. In rural Iowa, where I am from, the farmer cooperative can be the center of many of the community's actions. I have said for a long time in farm communities today they need at least a minimum of two important things to do business: they have to have a bank and they have to have an elevator. And I would say very often a co-op elevator. Both are very important. They are a must to do business down on the farm.

On the business side, the farmer cooperative can help create a business superstructure for individual farmers or other cooperatives which allow for a more coordinated and efficient farm operation. They supply services and supplies that are essential to the day-to-day running of the operation.

On the personal side, they allow farmers the opportunity to join together to provide inputs in the market, share information, and provide co-op regional support. My local farmer cooperative in Lamoni, Iowa, is part of the reason I am here today in the United States Congress. Back in the 1980s, during the last farm crisis, my neighbors and fellow farmers asked me to serve as the president of their co-op. We worked as a community to keep our people on the farm and to keep our towns and our schools and our churches and our local businesses viable.

Co-op members have always helped each other make it through the tough times by sharing resources and experiences and helping each other work